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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, January 11, 2007

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THE BAY CITY TIMES

Woman pleads guilty in case of infant who was killed by cocaine

Thursday, January 11, 2007

By ERIC ENGLISH

TIMES WRITER

WEST BRANCH - An Ogemaw County prosecutor said

24-year-old Sara Shelby stopped short Wednesday of admitting that she killed her

5-month-old daughter by feeding the infant breast milk contaminated with cocaine.

But Shelby, of West Branch, appeared in Ogemaw County Circuit Court to plead guilty to a charge of attempted manslaughter in connection with the 2005 death of her infant, Karie Bowman.

Ogemaw Prosecutor LaDonna Schultz charged that Shelby used the illegal drug, which then passed to her infant through breast feeding. A medical examiner subsequently ruled that the child died of cocaine intoxication.

Schultz said it was a tragic case.

"It's horrible. You've got a life gone before she even had a chance to live," Schultz said.

The infant died on Aug. 21, 2005, in a home near Prescott.

Shelby faces up to five years in prison when she is sentenced Feb. 7 on one count of attempted manslaughter. She was initially charged with involuntary manslaughter, which carries a possible

15-year sentence.

Schultz said she was satisfied with the plea agreement in part because Shelby also agreed to voluntarily terminate her parental rights to her other child, a 5-year-old girl.

The girl is currently in the care of her paternal grandparents, Schultz said.

During a preliminary examination in Ogemaw County District Court, Detective Sgt. Tom Grace, of the Ogemaw County Sheriff's Department, testified that Shelby told him she had taken cocaine two or three times the day before her daughter's death.

Grace said that Shelby told authorities she laid down with the infant and her other child for a nap and discovered the baby wasn't breathing an hour later. She called 911 and the infant was taken to West Branch Regional Medical Center by ambulance, where the child was subsequently pronounced dead.

The initial cause of death was believed to be sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS. But a blood analysis performed months later by a Michigan State Police Crime Laboratory showed the presence of metabolized cocaine in the child's system.

Kanu Virani, Oakland County's chief deputy medical examiner, testified at the preliminary examination that the baby died of cocaine intoxication and the amount of cocaine found in the infant's system could only have come from the food the child was eating.

Virani said the drug could have interfered with brain impulses that regulated the child's heart beat and other

functions.

Shelby's defense attorney, William D. Engemann of West Branch, said the plea was not entered into lightly, but was in the best interest of his client.

"Sara entered a plea agreement which is the best choice for her and her family at this time to help bring closure to a tragic episode," Engemann said.

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January 11, 2007

Eastpointe

Dad will stand trial in abuse

Police say man caused brain damage to infant girl, who remains in hospital.

Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News

EASTPOINTE -- In just over three hours Dec. 14, 5-week-old Alexa Wieckhorst went from sleeping peacefully in her swing to fighting for her life.

Police allege that during that time, the child's father, Ted Wieckhorst, inflicted injuries to the newborn that were so severe she remains hospitalized in the pediatric intensive care unit at St. John Hospital in Detroit.

The 20-year-old Eastpointe man was bound over Wednesday from 38th District Court to stand trial in Macomb Circuit Court on a charge of first-degree child abuse. Authorities say he caused injuries that included a skull fracture, internal bleeding, a cut lip and severe brain damage.

"This is a classical non-accidental trauma," said Dr. Alina Witkowski, co-director of the St. John pediatric intensive care unit who has cared for the girl since she was admitted. "She doesn't know how to suck. She doesn't know how to swallow. There will be a lot of problems we will face in the future."

Wieckhorst remains in the Macomb County Jail on \$500,000 bond. If convicted of first-degree child abuse, he could face up to 15 years in prison.

Investigators say that Wieckhorst was watching his two children -- Alexa and her 15-month-old sister -- while girlfriend Amber Levock went Christmas shopping.

Earlier in the day, Levock took the two children to the doctor for a checkup and both girls were fine, she testified in court.

When she left the Eastpointe apartment she shared with Wieckhorst about 3:30 p.m., Alexa was in her swing, she testified. When she returned about 7 p.m., the infant was "breathing funny," said Levock. "She was gasping for air."

Authorities said the couple took the girl to Wieckhorst's mother's house. Shortly after, Wieckhorst and his mother took the infant to the hospital. Along the way, the baby stopped breathing, and they took her to the Eastpointe Fire Department on Nine Mile.

Emergency medical technicians revived the baby there and transported the child to the hospital, where it was determined she had an "inflicted brain injury."

Since she was admitted, Alexa has undergone three brain surgeries to help relieve the pressure from swelling.

Wieckhorst told investigators that his daughter had thrown up, and while he was trying to clear her throat he bumped her head on the changing table. He also told police a cut on her lip came from a ring he was wearing.

When Eastpointe Police Detective Patrick Connor searched the house, he said he could find no sign Alexa had vomited. The apartment was littered with overflowing ashtrays and dirty diapers, he said.

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Father charged after dog mauls child

NEWBERRY, Mich. -- A man whose 3-year-old daughter was mauled by a family dog was charged Wednesday with child abuse.

Corey Thomas Wass, 27, was arrested Tuesday in Ann Arbor, where his daughter, Iris, was being treated. She was listed in serious condition at the University of Michigan Hospital.

Iris Wass was bitten and scratched numerous times last week at the home of Corey Wass' mother, police said.

As Corey Wass slept inside the house, the child went outside to an area where three dogs were tied up. She apparently became entangled in a chain holding a 120-pound Rottweiler, police said.

In a criminal complaint, prosecutor Peter Tazelaar said Wass failed to supervise the child, whom the dog injured repeatedly for about an hour. A neighbor finally saw what was happening, rescued the girl and called for help, Luce County Sheriff Kevin Erickson said.

Wass, of Newberry, was arraigned in district court on a second-degree felony child abuse count.

He was held in the Chippewa County Jail on a \$50,000 bond. He was scheduled for a preliminary examination Jan. 22. The charge is punishable by up to four years in prison.

Information from: The Mining Journal, <http://www.miningjournal.net>

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**
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January 11, 2007

Farmington Hills

Cop put on office duty after Taser incident

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

FARMINGTON HILLS -- A veteran police officer involved in the Dec. 13 traffic arrest of an off-duty Detroit police sergeant who was stunned with a Taser has been taken off the street pending an internal inquiry, Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer said Wednesday.

Dwyer made the announcement before showing reporters a copy of the patrol car video of the unnamed Farmington Hills officer arguing with David Marshall, a 12-year Detroit police veteran. Dwyer did not release the Farmington Hills officer's name.

Marshall is followed by the officer after allegedly driving through a red light and -- despite the officer's overhead flashing lights -- finally stops only to reach out his car window to pull his mail out of a mailbox. That's when the video shows he's confronted by the Farmington Hills officer, who walks up to Marshall's driver's side window.

"Picking up your mail is more important than stopping for me?" the officer asks Marshall, then asks for his ID.

"You see what I'm wearing," Marshall responds, referring to his Detroit police uniform. "I just got off work."

That prompts an angry exchange between the two in which the Farmington Hills officer asks Marshall, "You think you're someone special?" and orders him out of the car.

The two argue, and Marshall tells the officer to call a supervisor to the scene. When a backup officer arrives, Marshall can be heard commenting as if it is the supervisor he requested. But when he sees the second officer advance with a Taser, Marshall puts his hand on his own weapon.

"Don't go there," someone can be heard shouting out of sight. Then, the crackle of a Taser can be heard and a scuffle ensues in which Marshall is disarmed. When a sergeant arrives a couple of minutes later, the second officer said he fired his Taser "because (Marshall) went for his gun."

While Dwyer stressed his officer's administrative assignment was not to be viewed as a punishment or disciplinary action, he said he found the 16-year veteran's actions "disappointing to say the least."

"My officer did not perform to the level of professionalism expected by me and the Farmington Hills Police Department," Dwyer said, adding the second officer's actions and use of a Taser were justifiable under the circumstances.

Marshall was charged Monday in Farmington Hills District Court with interfering with a police officer, a misdemeanor, and a separate, unrelated charge of fourth-degree child abuse, a one-year misdemeanor, in connection with a complaint filed by Oakland County Protective Services regarding alleged abuse of his 12-year-old stepson. He is free on personal bond pending a Jan. 19 preliminary exam.

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Detroit cop says stop in Farmington Hills was racially motivated

Of The Oakland Press

FARMINGTON HILLS - Video footage of a routine traffic stop that led to the arrest of Detroit police Sgt. David Marshall - and a possible discrimination lawsuit against the Farmington Hills Police Department and the involved officer - was released Wednesday by Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer.

The incident occurred about 1 a.m. Dec. 13, when Officer Michael Meister, a 16-year veteran Farmington Hills police officer, attempted to pull over Marshall for reportedly running a red light at 10 Mile and Inkster roads.

Dwyer said he hopes releasing the video will show both parties acted unprofessionally. He also emphasized the involved police departments have a long-standing and professional working relationship and will "no doubt continue to do so in the future."

While Dwyer admits the manner in which his officer handled the traffic stop was disappointing and "is not in keeping with the high level of professionalism expected of Farmington Hills officers," he also said the "unprofessional and criminal conduct of the Detroit police officer led to his arrest."

"Despite allegations by the Detroit officer's attorney that this incident was racially motivated ... race played no part in the decision to stop the vehicle, played no part in the manner in which the stop was conducted or in any subsequent decision to pursue charges against the driver," Dwyer said.

The video shows Marshall, a 12-year-veteran, stopping his car to retrieve mail from his mailbox despite signals from the police car behind him. Meister exits his vehicle and confronts Marshall before learning his identity as a Detroit police sergeant.

"You think it's more important to pick up the mail than stop the car?" Meister asks in a loud voice. "Are you somebody special?"

After arguing about whether Marshall ran the red light, Marshall asks Meister, "Do you see what I'm wearing?" He then told Meister to call his supervisor to resolve the issue. After surrendering his license and registration, Marshall is told by Meister to get in the police car and release his revolver. He refuses and Meister physically attempts to escort Marshall to the vehicle.

"Don't put your hands on me," Marshall says in the video. "What is your justification for putting your hands on me? You have my license and paperwork. Why are you touching me?"

Meister responded, "Do you think I'm afraid of you? ... Because you're running your mouth, that's why."

Although a supervisor was called to the scene, another Farmington Hills police officer, whose identity is not being released, arrived first. Once that officer arrives, all three men are no longer in view of the video camera, but a scuffle can be heard in the background and Marshall is Tasered. Despite reports that he was Tasered three times, Dwyer said he was Tasered only one time by the unidentified officer, a 22-year-patrol veteran.

When the Farmington Hills supervisor, who also is not being identified, arrived at the scene, both parties were questioned. The unidentified police officer said he Tasered Marshall

because he "put his hand on his gun (and) I felt threatened."

Marshall denied the claim, stating he didn't put his hand on the gun until the officer pulled the Taster out.

"If you're going to write me a ticket, write me a ticket," Marshall says in the video, explaining why he felt he was attacked. "He had no probable cause of wanting me to get out of the car. ... The other officer showed up, and they both started putting their hands on me. ... He put his hand on his Taser, so I put my hand on my gun. You're not just going to Taser me. I put my hand on my weapon because he threatened to Taser me."

Marshall was taken into police custody and issued a traffic citation, which is a civil infraction, and a city ordinance citation for interfering with a police officer, a misdemeanor. He also is under investigation by the Farmington Hills Police Department for fourth-degree child abuse that reportedly occurred in May.

Marshall's attorney, Arnold Reed, said the child abuse charge is "nothing but a bogus scare tactic," and the Farmington Hills Police Department can expect a lawsuit.

"That's why they've brought up this charge at the 11th hour," he said. "There is no merit to these allegations. This is just another transparent attempt to besmirch (Marshall's) good name and emasculate the reputation of a police sergeant."

"Eight and a half months - that's how far these allegations go back. It's important to know there is no paperwork, no evidence ... nothing that proves this man committed child abuse. ... They aren't doing anything but fueling the fire. If they want a fight, they better put the gloves on because this is going on for 15 rounds, and I guarantee the last man standing will be Marshall."

Marshall was arraigned on all charges Jan. 8 at the 47th District Court. He pleaded not guilty and was released on \$1,000 personal bond. A pre-trial date has been set for Jan. 19.

Meister has been relieved of all patrol duties pending the outcome of an internal investigation. The unidentified officer is not being reprimanded because "an investigation revealed he was professional in using the Taser," Dwyer said.

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SB 1 Looks For Medicaid Incentives

MIRS, Wednesday, January 10, 2007

Traditionally, the first bill of each legislative introduced in the Senate is indicative of upcoming important issues. This year, it would appear that topic this year would be Medicaid reform.

Senate Health Policy Chair Sen. Tom **GEORGE** (R-Texas Twp.) got the honor of introducing the first bill of the 2007-08 session, which asks the federal government to allow the state to give incentives to Medicaid recipients that take good care of themselves.

"Much of our health problems stem, to some degree, from our own behavior," said George of **SB 0001**. "We need to look at Medicaid because the health behaviors of the recipients compared to the rest of the population tend to be worse. Medicaid also has limited resources."

The waiver would allow the state to create some incentives. For example, if a Medicaid recipient who smokes cigarettes cuts down on the number of cigarettes he consumes or quits smoking all together, he or she might have a lower premium.

Medicaid recipients who agree to certain lifestyle changes that make them healthier might also be allowed to get more Medicaid services. For example, the smoker might have dental insurance added to his or her Medicaid services if they quit smoking. Currently, dental insurance is an "extra" service.

The idea behind these incentives is that Medicaid recipients would pay less money for services or get more guaranteed services. A recipient who failed to change their lifestyle would not have any benefits taken away.

The exact incentives would be laid out if the waiver passes the Senate. George said he's read several medical studies that show behavioral factors account for as much as 30 percent of health care costs so a Medicaid incentives program could save the state up to 30 percent. Cost savings would depend on the scope of the program.

George introduced a similar bill last session. It passed the Senate, but did not make it through the House.

When the old bills went through committee, some Senators and the public voiced concerns about the effectiveness of Medicaid incentives. Some thought the program was good in theory, but would be far too hard to track.

Others thought that it would take benefits away from Medicaid recipients, which is a population that is traditionally hard to track.

"Those are all detailed question that would need to be worked out," George said about how the program would be implemented and tracked. He said that the incentives wouldn't take away benefits.

"The fact is other states are doing this and it's being done in the private sector," George said. "That's not a sufficient excuse anymore. I don't think we can ignore the contributing factor that we, as individuals, make in our own outcomes. We can't keep throwing treatments at people and expect it to work."

Though Senate Majority Leader Mike **BISHOP** (R-Rochester) has been closed mouthed about this caucus' agenda, Bishop Spokesman Matt **MARSDEN** said health care is at the top of Bishop's list.

Senate Dems are also interested in reforming the state's health care system and are willing to look at the proposal.

"Generally we're open to trying to improve health care and trying to get health care costs under control," said Senate Democratic Spokesman Tom **LENARD**. "At the same time we're always trying to be careful to strike a balance on containing costs and not punishing people."

SB 0001 would also ask the federal government to allow the state to jointly purchase some durable goods for Medicaid/Medicare, which would save the state some money. It also asks the federal government for permission to set up an electronic system to track Medicaid recipients and their care.

Gov Vetoes Oakland County Bonding Bill

MIRS, Wednesday, January 10, 2007

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** said no to legislation allowing well-managed local governments to bond out for future retirement and health care costs, noting that such legislation puts Michigan at risk of losing \$3 million in matching Medicaid funds.

In taking no action on **HB 6694**, sponsored by Rep. Dave **HILDENBRAND** (R-Lowell), in the 14 days after it was presented to her, Granholm effectively used her "pocket veto" power in killing legislation wanted by Oakland County, Kent County and other municipalities as a way to refinance future debt. It's a bookkeeping switch-a-roo estimated to save taxpayers in Oakland County \$150 million over 30 years, according to Oakland County Executive Brooks **PATTERSON**.

But Patterson doesn't buy the Governor's argument that federal Medicaid money was at risk. He said his own county officials debunked the Governor's excuse with federal authorities, who said Michigan would not lose any funds through this type of sale. Also the City of Detroit bonded out \$1.4 billion for this type of project without a peep from Granholm. In Patterson's mind this proves Granholm's stated reason was a phony "red herring."

Patterson said the Governor vetoed **HB 6694** for one reason: Politics. Patterson was the driving force behind securing the petition signatures that ultimately sped up the expiration of the Single Business Tax (SBT) late last year. Granholm's decision is a "slap in the face to the taxpayers of this state," he said.

"Paybacks are hell," Patterson said. "There is no question in my mind that this was a payback. Her arguments are either ignorant or incompetent...this is where a veto takes on the sad look of a petty, sad, vindictive act."

Granholm Press Secretary Liz **BOYD** denied that the two instances are connected in anyway. The bottom line is about money, as she said in Monday's edition (See "**Gov Concerned About Bonding Bill**," 1/9/07).

"It would be irresponsible to act on a bill that would cost the state millions of dollars at a time when we're expecting a \$3 billion shortfall in the budget," Boyd said. "We are not unsympathetic to what the locals are facing. We may need to find a federal solution and we hope the locals will work with us on that."

Boyd added that the veto is not about politics or Oakland County. Other municipalities would have been able to take advantage of the proposal. Besides, the Governor wanted to eliminate the SBT as well.

"This was all about the state's bottom line and that's why we passed on the bill," she said.

Today marked the last day the Governor is taking action on bills sent her by the 93rd Legislature. In total, the Governor pocket vetoed 20 bills. Including bills banning illegal immigrants from receiving certain state scholarships (See "[Granholtz Vetoes Illegal Immigrant Bills](#)," 1/5/07) and some housing contractor legislation (See "[Gov Signs Contractor Crackdown Bills](#)," 1/5/07).

Other bills that met their doom through pocket veto outside of a frost law bill include (see related story):

- [HB 4328](#), sponsored by former Rep. Leon **DROLET** (R-Clinton Twp.), which would allow petitions used in election to be 8 1/2 by 11 inches as opposed to 8 1/2 by 14 inches.

- [HB 6004](#), sponsored by Rep. Brian **PALMER** (R-Romeo), made six changes regarding intermediate school districts (ISDs), including the softening of the type of legal action that must be taken against county ISDs if a state Department of Treasury audit finds problems. The bill also tried to water down other ISD reforms put into place when former Rep. Ruth **JOHNSON** was working on the issue.

- [SB 1412](#), sponsored by Sen. Alan **SANBORN** (R-Richmond), would have allowed the Department of Human Services (DHS) to give its information on child abuse and child neglect to a federal registry designed to keep track of this information federally.

- [SB 0102](#), sponsored by Sen. Alan **CROPSEY** (R-DeWitt), would have renamed the Ionia Maximum Correctional Facility after former Sen. Jack **WELBORN**.

- [SB 1289](#), sponsored by former Sen. Bev **HAMMERSTROM** (R-Temperance), would have eliminated the special provision in state law that allows the Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Services Program (CMHSP) board to be made up six Detroit appointees and six Wayne County appointees. Hammerstrom long argued that the 6-6 deadlock on the board obstructed progress.

- [SB 0613](#), sponsored by Sen. Cameron **BROWN** (R-Fawn River Twp.), would make it a two-year felony to report past felonies or sex-related misdemeanors when applying for a job at a day care.

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Granholt Signs Long-Term Care Legislation

By 7 Action News
January 10, 2007

Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has signed legislation that will strengthen the state's long-term care system. The bills implement recommendations made by the Long-Term Care Task Force appointed by Granholm in 2004.

"The Long-Term Care Task Force report has provided a clear and well-researched road map to improving long-term care in Michigan," Granholm said. "My administration has already implemented a number of the recommendations, and these bills help us take the next step in our efforts to ensure that citizens have affordable, quality care throughout their lives."

The two bills address key recommendations contained in the task force report: Single Points of Entry and long-term care partnerships. A Single Point of Entry (SPE) is a program that enables a consumer to obtain information, screening, assessment of need, care planning and support, and referral services at a single location.

In June, the Granholm administration announced that four locations had been chosen as SPE demonstration sites. The four sites, located throughout the state, received a combined grant of \$34.83 million for a 27-month trial period. Providing complete long-term care services in a single location will create cost savings for the state while improving services. House Bill 5389 mandates the establishment of up to four SPEs and establishes a series of reporting requirements for them.

Long-term care partnerships provide additional care options to citizens once insurance benefits have been depleted. Currently, Michigan residents who have long-term care needs as a result of illness or injury must liquidate their assets and spend their savings before they qualify for Medicaid assistance. Under a long-term care partnership, residents will be able to retain some assets and still qualify for assistance.

Until recently, federal law prohibited Michigan and 45 other states from offering such policies. But a recent change in federal law, called for in the governor's task force report, eliminated the prohibition. House Bill 6478 authorizes the Department of Community Health, the Department of Human Services, and the Office of Financial and Insurance Services to establish long-term care partnerships in Michigan.

"We are committed to providing every resident in Michigan with access to affordable health care," said Granholm. "To achieve that goal, we must also ensure that citizens' long-term care needs are affordable and accessible as well. This legislation, combined with our on-going efforts, will help us achieve that goal."

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Gov Signs One Frost Law Bill, Vetoes Second

MIRS, Wednesday, January 10, 2007

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** signed legislation that allows public utility trucks to travel on rural roads during the "frost" months of March, April and May for emergencies only or for non-emergency work with the local county road commission's OK.

However, the governor pocket vetoed a second that would have allowed vehicles transporting heating fuel to travel along these roads.

The first bill was introduced because some utility and gas companies complained that the frost laws, which were designed to protect the state's roads, were prohibiting them from getting services to low-income people during chilly months.

The first frost bill, **HB 5259**, introduced by Rep. Tom **CASPERSON** (R-Escanaba), allows emergency work, but the trucks can only travel at 35 miles per hour. For non-emergency work, a county road commission must issue a permit.

The vetoed bill, **HB 5637**, sponsored by former Rep. Jerry **KOOIMAN** of Grand Rapids, gave heating fuel transportation trucks the same benefits. The governor gave no written explanations for her support of the first bill and her non-support for the second.

Granhholm also signed **HB 6478**, which lets the Department of Community Health, the Department of Human Services, and the Office of Financial and Insurance Services to establish long-term care partnerships in Michigan.

This bill as well as **HB 5389**, allow the state to set up a Single Point of Entry's (SPE), which allows consumers to get information, screening, assessment of need, care planning and support and referral services at a single location.

Granhholm also signed this bill, which was introduced by Rep. Rick **SHAFFER** (R-Three Rivers). **HB 6478** was introduced by former Rep. Barb **VANDER VEEN** of Allendale.

"We are committed to providing every resident in Michigan with access to affordable health care," Granholm said. "To achieve that goal, we must also ensure that citizens' long-term care needs are affordable and accessible, as well. This legislation, combined with our on-going efforts, will help us achieve that goal."

Granhholm also signed the following bills:

HB 6395, sponsored by Rep. Rick **JONES** (R-Grand Ledge), allows military IDs to receive the same status as driver licenses.

"Soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines should never be refused service in a restaurant or bar if they have a military ID," Jones said. "Our servicemen and women risk their lives

for our country and we should show them every possible courtesy when they return home."

HB 5901, sponsored by former Rep. Tom **MEYER** of Bad Axe, allows the Bad Axe Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to use tax increment financing.

HB 5947, introduced by former Rep. Lamar **LEMMONS** of Detroit, allows certain real estate developments in Detroit to be defined as neighborhood enterprise zones.

HB 4539, introduced by Rep. Virgil **SMITH** (D-Detroit), includes in the Neighborhood Enterprise Zone Act regulations for the homestead facilities proposed by **HB 4938**, and establishes the duration of their tax abatements.

HB 5966, introduced by Rep. Howard **WALKER** (R-Traverse City), extends higher fees that are charged to record deeds with county clerks, for another 10 years.

HB 5968, introduced by Rep. Tonya **SCHUITMAKER** (R-Lawton), says that a person who is eligible to have a domestic violence charge erased can't have any prior assault crime convictions.

HB 6030, introduced by Walker, establishes which part of a bed and breakfast may qualify for the homestead property tax exemption.

HB 6076, introduced by former Rep. Rich **BROWN** of Bessemer), clarifies the definitions of "materials affixed to" as they apply to a nonprofit hospital. **HB 6077**, which was introduced by Brown, says that an addition to a county long-term care facility qualifies as "nonprofit hospital" for purposes of the same sales tax exemption

HB 6108, introduced by Rep. Jeff **MAYES** (D-Bay City), establishes two exceptions to certain procedures governing property tax breaks granted to owners of rehabilitated "obsolete property." The exceptions apply to two particular projects in Adrian and Bay City.

HB 6182, introduced by Rep. David **LAW** (R-Commerce Twp.) requires law enforcement officials to notify the Department of Corrections with the particulars of an arrest warrant if information in the state's LEIN criminal information database shows that the person is on parole.

HB 6277 and **HB 6278**, introduced by Rep. Fulton **SHEEN** (R-Plainwell), eliminate the requirement for the Department of Treasury review a presumption that certain telecommunications equipment owned by government institutions and charities is 100 percent exempt from sales tax, regardless of whether it is also used part of the time for non-exempt purposes.

HB 6313, introduced by Rep. Joe **HUNE** (R-Hamburg), revises regulations concerning the liability of the Michigan life and health insurance guaranty association to pay off

claims by the beneficiary of an insolvent insurance company, the obligations of which have become a demand on the guaranty association.

HB 6323, introduced by former Rep. Gary **NEWELL** of Saranac, allows doctors to fax or e-mail their signatures so patients can have prescription drugs filled.

HB 6386, introduced by Rep. Shelly Goodman [**TAUB**] (R-Bloomfield Hills), exempts the transfer of tangible goods that are included in the sale of a corporate sponsorship by the Professional Golfers Association or the NCAA for a golf, basketball or hockey tournament held in Michigan through 2010 from the use tax.

HB 6599, introduced by former Rep. Mary **WATERS** of Detroit, makes it a felony for junk dealers and scrap metal processors to accept material that they know is stolen, subject to up to five years in prison and \$10,000 fine, depending on the source of the stolen material.

HB 6638, introduced by Lemmons, defines blighted property to mean that it has been declared a public nuisance in accordance with a local housing, building, plumbing, fire, or other code; is an attractive nuisance because of physical condition or use; is a fire hazard or is otherwise dangerous; has had the utilities, plumbing, heating, or sewerage disconnected, destroyed, removed, or rendered ineffective for one year or more; is tax reverted property; has code violations posing a severe and immediate health or safety threat and has not been substantially rehabilitated within one year after being ordered to do so by the appropriate code enforcement agency.

HB 6639, introduced by former Rep. Leon **DROLET** of Clinton Twp. defines blight for local blight reduction projects.

HB 5603, introduced by Smith, creates a state "reflex sympathetic dystrophy/complex regional pain syndrome work group" to advocate for public education and outreach.

HB 5608, introduced by Rep. Barb **FARRAH** (D-Southgate), lets the state enter into a multistate insurance compact.

HB 6173, introduced by Taub, clarifies some small details in the bills that require criminal background checks for teachers.

HB 6209, introduced by Kooiman, includes nonprofit corporations that operate a skilled nursing facility, adult foster care facility, or a home for the aged in the group of entities that are exempt from property taxes.



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Schwarzenegger earns applause

Health care for all children, even illegal immigrants', a challenge to status quo

Thursday, January 11, 2007

Guaranteed health care for children is the new political apple pie. No one can say he is against it, and it's a sure applause line for politicians who want to show concern for reducing the number of uninsured people in America.

But special recognition is due California's governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, who is reportedly ready to begin his new term with an actual proposal that his state insure all children. And by all, he means undocumented immigrants, too.

The proposal seems a challenge to fellow Republicans, and even to much of the state's Democratic leadership. Predictably, anti-immigrant groups say that including all children will cost billions more than the \$400 million experts estimate. In truth, the idea is economical and, if anything, quite modest.

Several states already have programs that cover all youngsters, including undocumented children who might not have access to government-subsidized care. California has what may be the biggest number of uninsured young people, more than 750,000. Most were born in the United States and are citizens.

Children, however, cannot take themselves in for medical care. That responsibility falls to parents and other caregivers, and when these adults are undocumented, they are often reluctant to take advantage of a child's birthright. California's programs to help the poor obtain health care have heavy enrollment in most communities, except among Hispanics. The state's history of discrimination against Latinos leaves many suspicious of government.

There's no reason to believe that a push, even from an immigrant governor like Schwarzenegger, would alone solve that problem. But the governor's efforts should infect the national health care debate. Insurance has become a luxury that eludes 47 million in America. Putting children first is a good start, because they are usually healthy and cheaper to cover. That's a reason to do the job the right way, without exceptions.

The New York Times

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Dentists putting smiles on faces with free event

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, January 11, 2007

By Shantell M. Kirkendoll

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Parents without health coverage to pay for their children's dental care can take advantage of the upcoming "Give Kids a Smile Day" when local dentists volunteer to care for kids teeth.

The one-day Genesee County initiative is Feb. 2 and designed to provide free educational, preventative and restorative services to children from low-income families.

Schools, agencies or parents can call (810) 659-4561, or e-mail givekidsasmile@gmail.com to set up an appointment with a volunteer dentist.

A parent or legal guardian must accompany the child to the appointment, and free transportation is available if arranged in advance.

- Shantell M. Kirkendoll

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Adoptions on the rise in state, data show

Thousands of kids remain in foster care

Posted by the [Asbury Park Press](#) on 01/11/07

BY MICHAEL RISPOLI
GANNETT STATE BUREAU

TRENTON — Adoptions rose and more foster and adoptive families were licensed in New Jersey last year, according to data released Wednesday by the state Department of Children and Families.

But the state's to-do list remains lengthy.

The department, created last July, released an update of previous data issued last October and November. It shows 1,370 adoptions were finalized and 1,280 families were licensed in 2006, but the totals may increase in coming weeks as final numbers come in.

"It's good news for these kids, there's no doubt about that," said Kevin Ryan, department commissioner.

Ryan, however, said he remains cautiously optimistic.

"We still have a lot of work to do. This is evidence that we are on the right track, but we still have a lot of work yet ahead of us," Ryan said.

That work includes developing pilot programs for the welfare system. Currently, one in the works is a "differential response" program, which would have workers deal with cases in which family stability is threatened.

Ryan said up to four counties will be selected to take part in this program in the spring, and if it's successful, the program could be implemented statewide.

Lawmakers created the department at Gov. Corzine's direction last July after the state reached a settlement with Children's Rights Inc., a child advocacy group in New York that sued the state, saying it neglected to properly protect children within its jurisdiction. The department oversees the Division of Youth and Family Services and is the state's first Cabinet-level department to specifically look over these issues.

"After years of failure and sometimes tragic results in our child-welfare system, structural reform and new investments have put us on a track to protect thousands of at-risk children," Corzine said during his State of the State address Tuesday.

Judy Meltzer, the monitor appointed by a federal court to track DYFS reforms following the lawsuit, said that while the department should be applauded for its accomplishments last year, there's a long way to go.

"Today in New Jersey, over 2,000 kids are waiting for adoptive families," Meltzer said. "You still have in New Jersey thousands of kids in foster care."

Meltzer is expected to release a monitor's report in February to verify the data released by the state and to make sure the department met benchmarks established by the settlement agreement.

Susan Lambiase, associate director for Children's Rights, said that while she is waiting to see the monitor's final report, all indicators are pointing in a positive direction.

"With good management and proper oversight, and a commitment to get the job done, child-welfare reform in New Jersey is possible," Lambiase said.

The data also showed a greater retention rate among caseload workers, with a 10.8 percent

turnover rate that's about 4 percent lower than in 2005. The number of referrals was also up, totaling 65,880, which is about 8,000 more than in 2005.

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Published January 11, 2007



(Photo by Victor Fitzsimons/Associated Press)

Woman shot to death: Emergency crews arrive at the scene of a shooting Tuesday in Mount Pleasant. Mary Babb, 30, a newspaper advertising representative, was shot to death Tuesday in a parking lot outside the Morning Sun offices after the vehicle she was driving was rammed and flipped over, police said. Police arrested her estranged husband.

Woman slain outside Mt. Pleasant newspaper

Police charge husband in wife's shooting death

Associated Press

A man was arraigned Wednesday in the death of his wife, who was shot in a parking lot outside the Morning Sun newspaper offices after police say she was rammed and flipped over in her vehicle.

Police say Mary Babb was still strapped in her seat belt and hanging upside down in her sport utility vehicle when Thomas Daniel Babb fired two rounds from a .20-gauge shotgun Tuesday as horrified witnesses looked on.

Mary Babb, 30, was pronounced dead at a hospital.

"Once a car flips onto its top, people take notice," said Mount Pleasant Police Officer Daniel Catlin. "It unfolded before their eyes."

Thomas Babb, 37, of Gaylord was arraigned on seven charges, including felony murder, open murder and aggravated stalking. He was being held without bail with a preliminary hearing set for Jan. 25.

Authorities say they believe Thomas Babb was waiting outside the Morning Sun offices about 4:30 p.m. when his wife, an advertising representative for the newspaper, drove her SUV into the parking lot. Witnesses told police the suspect then rammed Mary Babb's vehicle with his pickup, pushing it across the parking lot and causing it to roll over onto its roof.

Catlin said Mary Babb had seen her estranged husband and drove to the newspaper office hoping to find safety there. She had worked for nearly eight years in sales and management positions for Morning Star Publishing, the Morning Sun's parent company.

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January 11, 2007

Eastpointe man jailed in violent attack on girlfriend

Santiago Esparza / The Detroit News

A 26-year-old Eastpointe man is incarcerated at the Macomb County Jail on \$250,000 cash bond after being charged with beating his 20-year-old Warren girlfriend.

Clarence Williams is charged with assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than murder, resisting and obstructing a police officer and possessing marijuana, Eastpointe Police said.

Police said Williams on Jan. 7 attacked his longtime girlfriend at his home on Ash Street, hitting her in the head with a baseball bat and putting scissors to her neck. He also threatened to kill her, police said.

The victim was able to get away and had her mother drive her to Bi-County Hospital for help. When officers went to Williams' home, he was hiding with two pit bull dogs. Animal Control was called to handle the dogs and officers arrested Williams.

Marijuana also was found, according to an Eastpointe Police press release, but it was not clear if it was found on Williams or in his home.

The victim was released from the hospital after receiving staples to close a head wound caused by being hit with the bat, police said.

You can reach Santiago Esparza at (313) 222-2127 or sesparza@detnews.com.

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01/11/2007

Csapo fined for domestic violence

He has already sought counseling since June dispute

BY VICTOR SKINNER

vskinner@record-eagle.com

TRAVERSE CITY — Former Traverse City commissioner Rick Csapo must pay \$750 in fines and court costs and attend counseling sessions but received no additional jail time for assaulting his wife on a downtown street after a night of drinking.

District Court Judge Thomas J. Phillips sentenced Csapo Wednesday to three days in jail with credit for three days already served following the June 23 altercation along West Front Street. Phillips also ordered Csapo to stay out of bars.

"The important thing is you learn from this so it doesn't happen again," Phillips said.

Jurors found Csapo guilty of domestic violence Dec. 4 after only 35 minutes of deliberation. Witnesses testified they saw him argue loudly with his wife before he pushed her head against a window.

Csapo's attorney, Clarence Gomery, pointed out that Csapo has voluntarily sought treatment and counseling since the incident. Csapo has already suffered publicly for months and "has done everything possible to apologize," Gomery said.

"He has lost his job. He has lost his political position. I think that he has gone far and above," Gomery said.

But Assistant State Attorney General Erin House countered that Csapo has never admitted to assaulting his wife and deserved more jail time.

"He talks about making an error in judgement. He never once admits in his public apology that he assaulted his wife," House said. "His behavior is appalling."

An emotional and tearful Csapo talked about his alcohol problems and his struggle to overcome them, but did not apologize for the assault.



Record-Eagle/Tyler Sipe

Former Traverse City deputy mayor Rick Csapo, left, accompanied by his attorney Clarence Gomery, is overcome with emotion while addressing 86th District Court Judge Thomas Phillips at his sentencing at the Robert P. Griffin Hall of Justice in Traverse City.

- **Search begins for new Traverse City commissioner** - December 12, 2006
- **Csapo resigns from TC commission** - December 11, 2006
- **Officials may ask for Csapo to quit** - December 9, 2006
- **Traverse City officials want an apology from Csapo** - December 7, 2006
- **Csapo guilty of domestic assault** - December 5, 2006
- **Judge rejects motion to dismiss** - November 30, 2006
- **Csapo pleads to two charges** - September 28, 2006
- **Csapo faces new charges, blasts prosecutor** - September 22, 2006
- **Charges refiled** - September 21, 2006

"I have not touched a drop of alcohol since June ... nor do I want to," he said. "I accept my responsibility for that night. I was found guilty by a jury and I accept that."

- **Csapo's charges are dismissed** - September 21, 2006
- **Csapo charges dropped, to be refiled** - September 20, 2006
- **Earlier abuse allegations surface** - July 14, 2006
- **Csapo jailed** - July 12, 2006
- **Csapo pleads not guilty** - July 6, 2006
- **Csapo pleads not guilty** - July 5, 2006
- **Csapo charged for domestic violence** - July 1, 2006

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Article published Jan 11, 2007

Maria Stuart: Party provides glimpse inside shelter

LACASA — the organization that works to battle domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse — is celebrating a quarter-century in Livingston County with an open house on Jan. 30 that will offer a rare glimpse of life inside the shelter.

Maybe you're curious about what goes on behind the shelter doors. Maybe you've donated money to the shelter and wonder what it's like inside. Perhaps you know someone who's received help from the organization and you'd like to see how it operates. This is your opportunity to get a firsthand look at the shelter and office complex.

There will also be refreshments and celebratory proclamations, too, and rightly so: LACASA has been a tireless advocate for the right of everyone to be safe.

The last time the shelter was open to the public was during its grand opening celebration late in the summer of 2001. A lot has changed since then.

One of the biggest additions has been the SANE program. Before this, victims of sexual assault had to endure sometimes long waits in emergency rooms for examination and treatment.

Today, LACASA, in conjunction with Saint Joseph Mercy Livingston Hospital, has the sexual assault nurse examiner program up and running.

With the SANE program, registered nurses with advanced education and special training in forensic examination provide victims with private, compassionate care. They also coordinate efforts with police, prosecutors, hospital personnel and others, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

During the open house, you'll be able to see the totally outfitted SANE room, with its special exam table, forensic tools and computers.

There are other additions, too, and the shelter has been lived in for over five years now. It is a wonderful facility, brought about as the result of the largest capital campaign ever undertaken by a nonprofit organization in Livingston County.

What some of you may not realize is that the organization grew from the humblest of beginnings. In the beginning, those fleeing abusive situations found shelter on the couches and floors of LACASA volunteers. A hat was passed in order to raise money to pay for a phone line.

Then, the shelter operated out of a home in downtown Howell. Often times, families couldn't be sheltered together; sometimes, people were sheltered with strangers. As demand for shelter increased, the house couldn't adequately hold the program. Thus was born the capital campaign.

There were some who shook their heads when LACASA announced it was going to raise \$2.5 million to build a brand-new facility, thinking the goal totally out of reach. But as a longtime LACASA board member, I've learned to believe in the power of the organization.

Leap of faith after leap of faith after leap of faith has seen the organization grow from sheltering battered women in private homes to having its own administrative complex.

But those leaps of faith were always followed by the hard work of loads of dedicated volunteers who share the belief that everyone deserves to live in safety.

Many of us like to think that Livingston County, with its wide-open spaces and rural feel, is free from crime and problems that we think plague more urban areas. While we are an affluent and well-educated community, we are also living and breathing proof of the one constant of domestic violence: It slices through all social and economic lines; income, social status, education, community, size of home — none of it makes any difference to domestic violence, which plagues us all equally.

I'd be the proudest person in the world if I could say that because of LACASA's hard work, domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse have been banished from our community. But I can't.

The need for LACASA's services continues to grow.

However, I am so very, very proud of the work LACASA does. It's comforting to know there is a place for people to seek shelter when their own home is no longer safe for them.

The open house runs 5:30-7:30 on Tuesday, Jan. 30, at the shelter complex on Grand River Avenue in Howell Township. I hope to see each and every one of you there.

Maria Stuart is managing editor of the Livingston County Daily Press & Argus, as well as a longtime board member of LACASA. You can reach her by calling (517) 552-2856 or by sending e-mail to her at mstuart@gannett.com.



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Seek support for shared parenting legislation

Monday, January 10, 2007

By Darrick Scott-Farnsworth

On Dec. 12, the nine-member Family and Children Services Committee in the Michigan House of Representatives reported adversely on proposed legislation that would have allowed children to have substantial and continued contact with both fit parents.

The Shared Parenting House Bill 5267 died in committee because Democratic State Rep. Dudley Spade, 57th District; Brenda Clack, 34th District; LaMar Lemmons Jr., 2nd District; Gino Polidori, 15th District; and Republican Barb Vander Veen, 89th District, did not do their duty to our state's families because they failed to vote for the bill.

On the other hand, many thanks for voting for children go to Republican State Rep. John Stahl, 82nd District; Tom Pearce, 73rd District; Jack Hoogendyk, 61st District; and Fulton Sheen, 88th District.

Many people -- mostly concerned parents and citizens -- attended public hearings on the bill to voice support. Those with a financial interest in seeing the bill fail (such as the Friend of the Court Association, the Michigan Bar Association, the Michigan Chapter of the National Organization of Women, lobbyists from domestic violence groups, and even government employees) lobbied against the bill.

Bill supporters relied on a basic premise that children should have both parents involved in their upbringing as much as possible even after a divorce. This closely resembles how intact families already operate. However, the arguments against the bill obviously outweighed the importance of trying to maintain the right of a child to both parents.

The opposition argued that some women and children may be harmed by allowing a close relationship with both parents during and after divorce. The opposition believes that presuming both parents are equal, unless there is proof otherwise, is not a Michigan ideal. The opposition would have you believe that requiring proof of abuse is too high a standard for child custody, therefore no child should have the right to both parents.

I question the true motives of the opposition. Federal welfare programs paid for by Social Security -- like foster care, adoption assistance and child support enforcement -- provide hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding to each state only when children are separated from one of their parents. Typically, those who oppose shared parenting legislation are those who benefit financially from these programs.

Seventy percent of all owed-support is never collected because it comes from low-income fathers who typically never see their children. Billions will have been spent in 2006 alone for just the collection of child support across the country. An overwhelming majority of that money is spent on establishing orders and collecting support for the children of divorcing middle- and upper-class families whose fathers want to spend more time with their children but cannot, because of the current family court system.

Families in crisis legally do not have any other place to turn for help other than to the state court system. But if state courts were to allow both parents to continue to take an equal role in the responsibility of raising their children after divorce, this would minimize the orders for child support left for the state to enforce -- which would also mean the state would lose billions in federal funding; and so would those who consistently oppose keeping both parents involved after divorce.

Little common sense is needed to understand that sharing parental responsibilities doesn't harm children -- and it shouldn't take much to see how something like H.B. 5267 would instead cause more harm to those who benefit directly from the funding received when children are torn away from a parent.

These people do not take into account the overall social costs of denying children substantially equal time

with both parents. You can help our society by letting the committee members and your representatives know they need to support shared parenting. Let's begin to heal our state by building stronger family ties by respecting both parents equally.

Darrick Scott-Farnsworth is a resident of Augusta.

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— THE —
ANN ARBOR NEWS

LETTERS

Thursday, January 11, 2007

'Rockin' for the Hungry' sets charity records

This year broke all records for Food Gatherers' largest annual food drive, "Rockin' for the Hungry." Tons of thanks go out to the Washtenaw County community for stepping up to the plate in early December to help fight hunger locally. Special thanks to event sponsors - Busch's and Ann Arbor's 107.1 FM - for working tirelessly and "freezin' for a reason" in order to make this event possible. Non-perishable food items and financial contributions totaling more than 140 tons of food came to Food Gatherers during the five-day drive to help the 150 nonprofit programs served by Washtenaw County's food rescue/food bank organization. This translates into 186,000 meals!

Only through the goodwill of the community, our sponsors and our unwavering crew of volunteers is it possible for Food Gatherers to continue to help our nonprofit agencies on the front lines in the fight against hunger all year long. Food Gatherers' collection and distribution of surplus food not only enables recipient agencies to feed those in need, but to use their limited financial resources more effectively to address the causes of hunger and poverty.

Our community's goodwill this season will have an enormous impact on the lives of those struggling to gain access to healthy food. Thank you for giving so much and making it possible to keep our trucks on the road rescuing and distributing more than four tons of food daily. As requests for food continue to increase, we are thankful to have so many people willing to help fight hunger where we live.

Forever Gathering,

Kevan P. Lawlor, Brighton

The writer is president of Food Gatherers Board of Directors.

Eileen M. Spring, Ann Arbor

The writer is executive director of Food Gatherers.

Heating help requests down

By Kim Hoyum - khoyum@dailypress.net

ESCANABA — The day after Christmas, a family with two children went to the Menominee-Delta-Schoolcraft Community Action Agency (CAA). Their only income was unemployment benefits from seasonal jobs, and they were nearly out of propane with no money to get more. So the CAA had fuel delivered to them.

It sounds like a Christmas miracle, but it's just one heating assistance case of about 750 the CAA helped with last year.

The demands on the agency's heat assistance program have been a little less than usual this winter, said Cathy Pearson, executive assistant for the CAA.

"People still have to pay their heat, but it's been a relatively mild winter," Pearson said.

Although the first months of winter have been gentle on most heating bills, residents are already having trouble with basic needs can struggle when cold weather arrives. "As we progress through the winter months, the need is going to be there," Pearson said.

"We know this mild weather isn't going to last forever," added Bill DuBord, executive director of the CAA.

Another couple, seniors on a fixed income, were recent clients of the CAA. They live in a remote area and use propane for lighting, hot water and cooking as well as for heating their home.

After the wife became ill, much of their income went to her health care, and there was not enough left to buy the fuel they needed.

A household situation of unemployment or fixed income is not unusual for the agency's clients. "We're going to look at any household where there's been a layoff or loss of income," Pearson said.

In November, unemployment rates increased slightly in Delta, Menominee and Schoolcraft counties due to seasonal patterns, said analyst Kathy Salow of the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth. "By the time you get to November, you see people withdrawing from the labor force, the end of the summer tourism workforce," Salow said. "There's nothing alarming there — last year it did the same thing."

Combined with higher fuel prices, seasonal unemployment can result in unmet heating needs.

"Someone in a low-income situation rarely has the room in their budget to come up with a \$200 or \$300 shortfall," said Mark Kwarciany of the Department of Human Services (DHS) Menominee office. The DHS can help with heat costs as well. Sometimes clients have a co-pay responsibility, based on their income.

"If someone does get a denial from our agency, they can get help from other agencies," Kwarciany said. "We have a very, very close relationship with a lot of community agencies."

Pearson said the CAA is the secondary provider of heat assistance in the area, after the DHS. The St. Vincent de Paul Society also has some heating help available, as does the Salvation Army.

"We do coordinate with these other agencies, which is very important," DuBord said. "We try to utilize the money in the best way to help the most people."

The CAA's Walk for Warmth, an annual event, provides a way to keep the agency's heating fund balance steady.

Last winter, the walk raised about \$40,000 in Delta County, and \$53,000 in the tri-county area. It is held in all three counties, and the money raised within a county stays there, Pearson said. Walk for Warmth is scheduled for Feb. 24 this year.



Agencies can apply for grant through United Way

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

GENESEE COUNTY

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, January 11, 2007

By Ron Fonger

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Agencies providing emergency food, shelter or energy assistance to residents of Genesee or Lapeer counties can apply for a federal grant administered locally by the United Way of Genesee County.

For the past 23 years, Genesee and Lapeer counties have been awarded funds to distribute under the program.

This year, Genesee County is set to receive \$352,998, slightly more than 2006. Lapeer County is set to receive \$71,312, a slight decrease, according to a news release.

Applications are available from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday at the United Way office, 328 S. Saginaw St., Suite 501, Flint. The deadline for applying is 4 p.m. on Jan. 17. For more information, call Pam Nelson at (810) 762-5824.

- Ron Fonger

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Granholm asks for a budget fix

She picks group, gives it 3 weeks; tax hike predicted

January 11, 2007

BY DAWSON BELL

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Gov. Jennifer Granholm announced Wednesday the formation of a special commission of public sector experts, led by a pair of former governors, to advise her on how to remedy the state's dismal financial situation.

Some of the governor's critics said the makeup of the group indicates Granholm is looking for political cover for proposing a tax increase.

Ex-Govs. William Milliken and James Blanchard will co-chair the Emergency Financial Advisory Panel, which Granholm asked to come up with ideas to address the growing imbalance between state spending and income.

And fast. The panel is to deliver its recommendations by the end of the month.

Budget experts predict state budget shortfalls of more than \$500 million for this year and up to \$3 billion in 2008.

The panel also includes several former Republican legislators, Michigan State University President Lou Anna Simon and Sister Monica Kostielney, president of the Michigan Catholic Conference.

Granholm said they were chosen because of their diverse backgrounds and depth of experience with state government. Spokeswoman Liz Boyd described them as "a diverse group with diverse opinions."

David Littmann, senior economist at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, an advocate of limited government, said the panel's composition almost certainly guarantees it will recommend more taxes, more government spending and more borrowing.

"These are the people who presided over Michigan's economic decline," Littmann said. "The probability they will come up with something creative is as close to zero as you can get."

Granholm also was criticized by some Republicans for waiting so long to create such a panel. She was first elected more than four years ago and won re-election Nov. 7.

She is scheduled to present solutions in her State of the State address and budget presentation in early February.

Boyd said the panel was in development "for some time" before Wednesday's announcement, and that the urgency of finding budget solutions is growing.

Panel member Don Gilmer, a former Republican lawmaker and state budget director from Kalamazoo, said it was Monday evening when he was asked to participate.

Gilmer said the group was not given any directives about what solutions Granholm favors. He said, however, that he would consider a tax increase.

"I think she chose people who had been through these kind of tough times before and have some idea what has worked and what hasn't," he said.

"This is not an 'R' problem or a 'D' problem," he said, referring to the two parties. "It's a state

of Michigan problem."

Contact **DAWSON BELL** at 313-222-6604 or dbell@freepress.com.

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